

beyond the darkening horizon (there is hope)

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Category: 100

Genre: Romance, Sci-Fi

Language: English

Characters: Clarke G., Lexa

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2016-04-10 18:51:56

Updated: 2016-04-10 18:51:56

Packaged: 2016-04-27 20:26:56

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 9,773

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: (Post 3x07 Fix It Fic) The Grounder world splinters as Lexa and Ontari vie for legitimacy, sprouting civil war. Pike's control over Arkadia tightens and tensions come to a deadly head. The City of Light looms, lethal, on the horizon. Clarke must wrestle with death and war to bring peace to the ground, all the while learning what it's like to love someone who's lost everything.

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Part One

Lexa opens her eyes to a searing pain unlike anything she's ever felt in all of her life.

Her vision is a little hazy, red around the edges, the crust of dried tears caking the lids of her eyes. Her entire body aches, like she's been ripped in two and tried to be sewn back together; her torso hurts like she's been run through with a sword, or worse (and she had been run through with a sword before). She tries to breathe deeply to assuage the prickling of pain in her lungs. She only ends up sputtering on her own saliva, choking against the rawness of her throat. Her arms twitch with the effort.

"Lexa!" Clarke's voice is so loud, so emotional. Suddenly she's there, hovering over her body with her face tear stained and blotchy, her hair falling in curtains around her beautiful face. (Lexa's never felt so blessed to open her eyes before). She feels Clarke take her hand, soft fingers brushing gently over her knuckles.

"Clarke," she finally manages to choke out. It sounds low and rough, full of strain, but Clarke's face beams down at her, a strange mixture between a laugh and a sob bubbling up from her lips, and Lexa forgets what pain even is against the vibrance of Clarke's eyes.

"You're okay," she says, heaving in a stuttering, shaky breath, "You're okay." Lexa blinks, trying to push the fatigue and the haze out of her head. She pushes up against the pillows behind her head, grunting with the effort, but Clarke tightens her hold on Lexa's hand.

"Don't try to move," she speaks through tear-filled, relieved eyes, "You need time to heal." Lexa lets out another cough, trying desperately to remember what had transpired before she opened her eyes to injury and beauty.

She sees memories dance across the backs of her eyelids in a sudden, vivid flash of clarity; can feel the ghost of Clarke's touch, the softness of her hips as they tangled together on Lexa's bed, the sun in her eyes as they kissed away the rest of the world, desperate and insistent. She can feel her own happiness, the swell in her chest at the gentleness of their love making, the smile gracing Clarke's lips as they lay together, wrapped in each other's arms; the feeling of giving herself utterly and completely to Clarke, and have something monumental given in return. She remembers it all in flashing colors.

And then she remembers the gunshots. The Sky boy staring wordlessly behind Clarke, the bullet in her stomach, the flow of blood against her hands as she collapsed to the ground. She remembers Titus' distraught face, the gun clattering to the ground from his hands as Clarke's pleas to not give up ring in her ears as she struggles to breathe. She remembers uttering _ai gonplei ste odon_; she remembers Clarke's broken voice howling _I want _you, _I will fix you, you'll be okay_; she remembers not believing those rushed words of comfort. She remembers feeling death approaching, quick and painful, but she remembers looking into the vastness of Clarke's affection and thinking that going right now, filled to the brim with the knowledge of Clarke's feelingsâ€¦that would be alright. She remembers the soft, gentle, tearful press of Clarke's lips against hers as she whispers _may we meet again_, as Lexa tells her she was right â€“ life _is_ about more than just surviving. And then, blackness. Until a few moments ago, opening her eyes to the sight of Clarke.

"What happened?" She croaks out, even though she knows.

"You got shot," Clarke says, threading her fingers through Lexa's, squeezing in reassurance. Her free hand comes up to rest on her shoulder, fingertips brushing against sweaty skin.

"It was touch and go for a long time," she continues, a fresh wave of tears welling in her blue eyes as she speaks, "But I managed to get the bullet out and stop the bleeding as best as I could." Clarke swallows thickly before continuing.

"We thought you were dead." Lexa blinks rapidly as Clarke closes Lexa's shoulders deflate, "_I _thought you were dead. Titus was about to cut you open but I wouldn't let him._"

"_Move aside, Clarke," Titus says as soon as Clarke closes Lexa's eyes, low and gruff as he elbows her in the side, brandishing a scalpel, the blackness of Lexa's blood glistening on the baldness of his head. _

"_No!" She shouts, tears falling against her cheeks as he attempts to

take her in his arms, to bring her away from Lexa's lifeless body, "No!" —

"_Clarke, please," Titus pleads, his voice wet with emotion; "She is gone. Let her spirit be freed. Let me do my duty. Please." Clarke shakes her head, but allows Titus to extract her from Lexa's side anyway, putting her trembling body a safe distance behind him before advancing on Lexa's corpse. —

_He flips her over like she weighs nothing, like she _is _nothing anymore; no longer important, like she wasn't _Heda_, like she wasn't the woman Clarke loved, tough and headstrong and brilliant and kind, like she wasn't the great unifier of twelve constantly warring clans, like she wasn't a person who was living and laughing and happy mere hours ago. He flips her over like she's disposable, and it makes Clarke sick to her stomach. —

"_What are you doing? What are you doing? Stop," she says, panic in her voice. She wants Lexa's body intact, whole, so she can put her to rest and give her the send off she deserves. She doesn't know what he's doing, she doesn't know and she wants to scream. —

_Titus doesn't respond, favors ignoring her, and Clarke knows how much he dislikes her, how much he disapproved of their relationship. She hates him. —

"_Hey, it's okay, let him do what he needs to do. There's nothing you can do now. You have to let him handle it. Let's go somewhere else. You don't need to see this." She feels Murphy's hands on her shoulders, trying to pull her away from the scene, but she can't look away, she can't leave, and Murphy has no right to think he knows anything about the way that she feels, like he has any right to show her kindness after all the things he's done (Maybe she's being a bit hypocritical; after all, what has Murphy done that she hasn't done herself? Who's to say he doesn't feel the same self-hatred coursing through his system that she does)? —

"_C'mon, Clarke," Murphy tries again, his voice soft and imploring, his fingers curling around her collarbone. —

"Don't _touch me," she says, throwing his hands off of her shoulders, rushing forward and knocking Titus out of the way just as he slices into the skin on Lexa's neck, right in the middle of her infinity tattoo. —

"_Clarke!" He yells, stumbling to the side as Clarke presses her fingers against the sluggish flow of blood from her neck wound, rubs gently as she hooks her arms around Lexa's middle and turns her over gently. She won't let him desecrate her memory. She just died. Clarke will protect her. —

_She drapes her body over Lexa's, staring him down through tear stained eyes. —

"_Get out of the way,_ Wanheda_," he seethes, anger in his gaze now, fiery with unrestrained hatred, "The next Commander must be chosen. There are rituals you do not understand."—

_She tightens her grip on Lexa, ignores the pleading and the pity in Murphy's dark eyes. —

"_No." Titus groans in exasperation. _

"_Do not make me forcibly remove you. I promised _Heda_ I would not harm you. I do not want to break that promise to her. Do not make me break that promise, _Wanheda._" _He takes a warning step forward, scalpel still clutched in his palm, stained with Lexa's night colored blood. _

"_Hey, come on," Murphy says, darting forward to put himself between Clarke and Titus, "Give her a fucking minute." _

"_You do _not _get to tell me _anything_, you worthless piece of _Skaikru_ trash!" Titus roars, the veins in his forehead and neck bulging with the effort. Murphy stands his ground, hands clenching into fists, rolling his eyes in fresh annoyance._

_Clarke buries her face in Lexa's chest, trying to block out the horror around her, to return to before all of this happened, when she and Lexa had trouble physically separating until Clarke dragged herself away, Lexa's fingers only slipping from her grasp when she'd left the room entirely, disappearing around the frame of the door, heart filled to the brim with simultaneous hope and sadness. _

"_I have vowed not to harm _Wanheda_, but I have no qualms about harming you," Titus growls through gritted teeth. _

"_Yeah, yeah, old man. We've already been through that like a thousand times. Get a new calling card, I'm getting tired of that one," Murphy says, voice laced with sarcastic nonchalance. Clarke knows that Titus is losing his patience, but she wants to stay here with Lexa forever, until it's time for her to join her. _

_She truly is _Wanheda_. Commander of Death. Everything and everyone she touches meets a gruesome fate. She should have stayed out in the woods. She should have never ventured back into civilization. She should never have slept with Niylah and let her guard down long enough for Roan to capture her. She should have never done any of that. Maybe if she hadn't, Lexa would still be alive. She hates herself, even more now than she did after Mount Weather, if such a feat was even possible. She nudges her head farther into Lexa's chest when she hears it. _

Lub-dub.

A long, strained pause. A moment where she thinks she's imagined it. Until she hears it again. Louder, more sure.

_Lub-dub. _

_Clarke shoots up like a rocket from her prone position over Lexa's body, Murphy and Titus moments away from coming to blows when she screams out. _

"_She's alive!" Both of them stop their yelling, turning to face her.

_

"_What?" Titus asks, voice hollow and raw. _

"_I can hear her heart, it's still beating! Barely, but it's there!"

Clarke's hands fly over Lexa's frame, pressing against the wound.

—

"_I knew you wouldn't give up on me, Lexa," she whispers through her tears, "Fight for me, Lexa, come back to me." She presses another kiss to Lexa's lips before she springs into action. _

"_Murphy! Go find a healer down in the marketplace. Get me bandages and a needle and a very thin tube. Get me everything they have. Go, now!" She shouts at him. _

"_You got it, boss," he says, mock saluting her before he throws the doors open. She can hear his running footsteps disappearing down the hallway. _

"_Titus, find the natblidas. Do it now." Titus nods wordlessly at her, scalpel dropping from his hands and clattering to the ground in his rush to follow her orders. _

_Clarke keeps her hands pressed against Lexa's abdomen. _

"_I'm going to fix you, Lexa. I'm going to fix you. Don't let go just yet," she pleads, "Don't let go." _

"That's when I heard your heart beating. And I didn't stop until I could hear you breathing again. I didn't stop until I could actually feel your pulse beneath my fingers. I didn't stop until I thought you'd make it out the other side." Clarke blinks back tears, her grip on her hand tightening. Lexa's lips curl up into a barely there smile.

"You saved me."

Clarke smiles, eyes wet with fresh tears, "I did." That's when Lexa finally takes in her surroundings beyond Clarke, only she's met with unfamiliar designs. She furrows her brow. She doesn't think she's ever been here before. The thought doesn't frighten her; only makes her curious.

A loud voice interrupts her moment.

"Did a perimeter check like you asked. Still didn't see any of our Grounder pals or that stupid bald dude so I think it's finally safe to say we made it out without anybody noticing." The voice stops abruptly, and Lexa squints slightly against the barrage of sound but manages to make out the scarred face of the Sky boy she'd seen in the room behind Clarke when she'd gotten shot.

"Oh, shit," he exclaims, his voice only rising in volume, much to Lexa's discomfort, "She's awake!" He shuffles on his feet, looking between her and Clarke rather awkwardly.

"She okay?" Clarke nods.

"I think so." The boy nods, his eyes darting around the room, settling on nothing for too long.

"Well I'll give you two some privacy. Me and the kid'll keep a look out for any Grounders or something, I don't know."

"Thanks, Murphy." Ah. Murphy is his name. The Sky boy nods, waving his hand in Clarke's general direction.

"Yeah, yeah. Whatever. Thank me when we're all not dead and somewhere else." Clarke chuckles softly as he makes his exit.

Lexa's throat feels dry and unsteady. And she's beyond confused.

"Where are we?" She asks, "We are not in Polis, are we?" Clarke looks away from her eyes, turning her gaze instead to their joined hands, watching her thumb trace shapes against Lexa's bruised knuckles.

"Not exactly."

"Then where?"

_Titus makes it back first. _

"Heda!" _ Aden shouts, running to her side, tears in his eyes. His fellow Nightbloods follow suit, coming to stand around their fallen leader in wide-eyed shock. _

_Aden looks up at her, "What happened?" Clarke can't help the way he reminds her of Lexa, steel to his words and fire in his eyes.

-

"_She was shot accidentally." Clarke steadily avoids looking over at Titus. She still wants to kill him. _

"_By who?" Another Nightblood speaks up, twisting her hands together across her stomach. _

_Clarke sighs. "Titus." The Nightbloods whirl on him. _

"_What?!" They start shouting things in Trigedaslang, but they're too fast and slurred and they're all talking over each other and Clarke only really cares about Lexa right now, so she doesn't catch what they're saying, but if the look on Titus' face means anything, it's probably nothing good. Clarke feels a strange sense of pride in their loyalty and compassion to their leader. _

"Em pleni!" _Titus roars, and the Nightbloods calm eerily fast.

-

"Wanheda_ has asked you here. Enough with this madness. Your _Heda_ requires your help. Do your duty." Aden is the first to nod. _

"Sha, Fleimkepa_." Clarke leans her head against Lexa's chest again, desperate to hear her heartbeat again, afraid she won't feel its tentative thumps against her ear. _

_She doesn't. _

"_No," Clarke whispers, "No, no, Lexa, no, wake up, don't do this!" She shakes at her lover's shoulders, presses against the wound, tries to hear into her bones. _

"_Is she gone?" Titus asks, stooping to pick up his fallen scalpel.

The Nightbloods stand still, unsure of where they should go, what they should say. But they all stare at their Heda with the same mask of horror and pain. —

"_I don't know; I can't hear her heartbeat anymore!" She shouts, frantic. Titus moves to her side again._

"_You've done all you can, Wanheda," He says, soft this time, a hand on her shoulder, "Lexa would wish for you to let her go. Find her peace. She is gone, Clarke. Release her." —

And Clarke looks at Lexa's face, frozen in pain, and she gives in. She does not want her to suffer. If this, if releasing her spirit will bring this woman the peace she needs to find greener pastures, then how could she deny her that? How could she not do everything to make sure Lexa is taken care of? That she's safe?

_She nods. —

"_Okay." Titus purses his lips, and brushes her out of the way. He turns Lexa to her side and pries apart the opening on the back of her neck that he'd made before, re-cutting open the incision. He reaches in, and pulls something out._

_It's fairly large and glowing blue, tentacle like arms snaking out from inside Lexa's head. It's gruesome. Titus lets Lexa's body fall gingerly back onto the bed. The Nightbloods stare in shock.

—

_Clarke moves immediately back to Lexa's side, placing her head on her chest again, taking comfort in her dead lover's presence.

—

"_What is that?" She whispers, and she strains to hear Lexa's heartbeat, even though she knows she won't. —

"_The Commander's spirit," Titus says reverently, placing it into a small compartment adorned with the drawing of a skull.

—

"Natblidas," he addresses Lexa's novitiates, "It is time to prepare for the Conclave. Heda's body will be ready for your purification rituals in a few hours. Go. Get ready. Say your goodbyes. It is time." The Nightbloods look at each other in apprehension, eyes darting between Clarke, Titus, and their Commander's body. —

_That's when Clarke hears it again. A faint stutter of movement in Lexa's chest. —

"_Wait! She's alive," She shouts again, "Titus, she's still alive!" Titus shakes his head, moving towards the door._

"_It is over, Wanheda._ She is no longer Heda. Her body was a vessel. She must die now, no matter if she is still alive by your standards." He reaches the door, exiting into the hallway, his eyes dark and lifeless. —

"_You must let her die now, Clarke. You must." Clarke shakes her head. —

"_You were willing to help me save her five minutes ago!" Titus nods.

_

"_But now she is not _Heda_. I must pledge my duty to another. _Natblidas, _please. Your trials await." And with that he's gone, sweeping down the hallway. The Nightbloods shift on their feet uncertainly. _

"_But _Heda _is not dead," a young boy with a mop of jet black hair says, face scrunched in painful confusion, "She is alive. She needs us." Aden nods, squaring his shoulders resolutely. _

"_Go. I will stay. I will be whatever _Heda _needs from me." Clarke gapes. He truly is strikingly like Lexa. _

The others nod, although they're still apprehensive at best.

"_Please," Aden says, "Go." They finally move, reluctantly. _

"_Good luck," they whisper to him before they file out of the room, each laying a hand on Lexa's shin before doing so, giving her a reverent bow._

"_They need you at the Conclave," Clarke murmurs, never taking her hand off of Lexa's still bleeding wound, "Lexa would want you to fight for that Commander position." Aden shrugs off her concern.

_

"Heda _needs me," he says simply. _

_Clarke hears the approach of running footsteps, heavy and loud. She jumps to her feet when Murphy enters, several women behind him, clutching a basket full of supplies. _

"_Got it," he wheezes, breathing heavily as he bends to rest against his knees. Clarke runs forward, taking the basket from him and beckoning the healers to come to Lexa's side. _

_She explains the situation. _

"_If we can get the bullet out, stitch her up, and get some more blood into her, we might be able to save her," Clarke finishes. The three women nod, and Clarke gets to work. She barks orders, handing out supplies, and she realizes how much she sounds like her mother._

_She suddenly aches for Abby, wishes she was here. Lexa might have a better chance at survival if Abby was around, a real doctor, not whatever mediocre training Clarke gained from watching her work for years. But this is all there is. And she must be strong for her Commander. _

One of the women gets the bullet out with the help of Clarke's guidance.

"_We do not think there is much internal damage," she says, accent harsh, like she isn't familiar with the use of English._

"_But she lost much fluids," the other pipes up, wiping away blood as

she prepares to stitch the wound. Clarke nods. —

"_That's what Aden is here for." She nods to him, and he steps forward. —

"_Give me your arm." He obliges, offering up his hand for Clarke to take. She pushes the sleeve of his tunic up to his shoulder, feels around for a vein in the middle of his arm. She's never done something like this before. She can only hope it will work. It has to work._

_She pulls out the hollow needle Murphy had supplied her, and she uncurls the crude tube. She inserts part of it into Lexa's arm and other into Aden's and watches slowly as black blood begins to move between their now connected limbs. Clarke breathes a heavy sigh of relief after a few moments of bated breath, when it appears that Lexa's body is not rejecting the transfusion. —

_One of the women gazes up at Clarke. "All finished," she says, and Clarke inspects the intricate stitching. She should have given the Grounder healers more credit. After all, they _do _live down here. She's sure they've dealt with more than enough issues, more than Clarke at least. She shouldn't have ever doubted their abilities.

—

The other woman pulls out a salve, rubbing it against Lexa's skin.

"_We are not accustomed to gun wounds," she murmurs, "But we hope this will help." Clarke nods. —

"Mochof_," she says, as sincerely as she can through the hoarseness of her throat. —

"Ai laik _Albe," she offers, before gesturing to the other two women, "This is Hope and Ghany." —

"_Clarke," she returns. —

Albe smiles, "Yes, we are aware of you. Klark kom Skaikru,_ legendary Mountain slayer. We owe you a great debt. And _Heda_ seems to respect you greatly." Clarke closes her eyes against the mention of Mount Weather. She hates that people see that as a victory, as something good she did, like she didn't steal the lives of 382 people, take the air straight from their lungs, burn them from the inside out. Like she didn't commit genocide. —

"_My brother was a prisoner there. _Heda _freed him and you destroyed the men that hurt him. You took away our biggest threat. We thank you," Hope steps in, a sad understanding in her eyes. —

Clarke fidgets, but decides that these women clearly want to thank her, so she'll let them.

"_You're welcome." Albe beams in response. Clarke finally collapses to her knees beside Lexa, reaching out and taking her cold hand within hers. She moves to rest her head against Lexa's shoulder, uncaring of her audience. —

"_You're going to be okay," she whispers, "you're gonna be okay." The

women stay, despite the rather compromisingly intimate position Clarke has taken up with their Commander, and Murphy sits on the floor across the room, head pressed against the wall, his eyes shut, breathing heavy and even. _

_She looks at Murphy in a new light now. She'd called him a friend to Titus before Lexa was shot, but she didn't really mean it; knew Murphy looked uncomfortable by the words. She only considered him one of the Sky People, and she has a duty to protect them, even Murphy. But nowâ€|.well, Murphy certainly didn't have to stay. He could have cut and run. But he didn't. And there's something strange Clarke feels about him now, like there truly is another layer to him that she's just uncovered. Or maybe he's just changed, as they all have. Maybe the ground made him softer, instead of harder, like it did to Clarke, to Octavia, to everyone else. Maybe there's something redeemable about him after all. _

_She sits up after a few minutes, taking the tube out of Aden's arm.
—

"_What are you doing?" He asks, voice laced with worry, glancing back at his Commander. _

"_It's okay, Aden," she says, soothing her fingers over the puncture wound, "You need a break or you'll pass out." He relaxes, slumping into a chair, closing his eyes to mirror Murphy. Clarke takes a moment to observe Lexa. Her chest is barely rising; if you didn't stare close enough it would look like it wasn't. But there's some color to her cheeks again, and Clarke feels like she can breathe again. She puts the tube back in the basket for later use, leaning forward again to lace her fingers with Lexa's. _

"_You care for _Heda_?" Albe asks quietly, eyes taking in the scene before her. Clarke isn't even sure how to answer, if she even wants to answer, if Lexa would want her to answer. But Clarke's tired of lying, to the world, to herself, to Lexa. She doesn't want to run from these feelings anymore. She doesn't have the strength to try.
—

"_Yes," she whispers in return, sweeping her eyes reverently over Lexa's face, taking in every inch of her. _

_Albe lets out a low chuckle. _

"_What an act of wonder," she replies, and Clarke is startled by the admiration in her voice. _

"Heda _deserves someone to care for her the way you clearly do. She has been good to the world. The world should be kind in return," she smiles. _

_Clarke feels tears in her eyes again and she squeezes Lexa's hand in her own. _

"_Yes, it should." Whether or not it ever would be, well, perhaps only time would tell. _

Aden suddenly jumps from his chair.

"_Clarke," he says, voice urgent and demanding. She turns to look

worriedly at him. —

"_Fleimkepa_ will return for _Heda's _body soon, so my fellow _natblidas_ can begin the purification ritual. If we want to keep her safe we must go, far from here." Clarke had nearly forgotten about the Conclave in all the commotion since Murphy had come back with the healers. —

_Hope presses several bottles of medicine into Clarke's hands, explaining exactly how each was to be used and when. —

"_Murphy," she calls, and he opens his eyes to stare at her.

"_What is it, boss?" —

"_Are you coming with me or not?" He shrugs, pulling himself to his feet. —

"_Well I don't have anything better to do, so yeah. I'll help you out." She smiles gratefully. —

"_Thank you." —

"_Whatever." He's still rude and sarcastic, but he'd tried to comfort her, helped her when she asked. She thinks she likes these new layers of him. —

"_We need to build some sort of makeshift stretcher to carry her out of here on," Clarke murmurs, "and we'll need horses." —

"_Not to be a downer here or anything, but how exactly do you plan to carry a half-dead girl on a stretcher through the woods with just a horse?" Murphy scoffs, raising his eyebrow up at her. Clarke runs her hands through her hair in exasperation. She clearly wasn't thinking far enough ahead. She mentally kicks herself for the oversight. —

"_My family owns a small wagon," Ghany offers up, "I will give it to you, for _Heda._" There's a reverence in her eyes, a pride, at being able to help Lexa in some small way. She forgets sometimes how much Lexa's people love her. It warms her heart to know there are other people out there who won't give up on her. —

"_We will meet you four blocks east of here with extra supplies and our wagon. We will help you out of the city, but then we must return." Clarke swallows against the lump in her throat, touched by their kindness. —

"_I wouldn't ask you to do anything more than that. You've already done more than enough." They bow, and exit the room, hurriedly making their way to the lift. Clarke turns to Murphy and Aden. —

"_I am coming with you," Aden speaks before she has a chance to say anything. —

"_Aden â€œ" she tries, but he cuts her off. —

"_If _Heda _needs blood then I am the only one who can provide for her. Let me come." She sighs. —

"_Okay." _

_They build a stretcher out of a board of wood they break off the bed, laying Lexa on top of it and covering her with furs, placing a pillow underneath her head. _

"_Now we just have to figure out how to get her out of here without being seen," Murphy scowls under his breath, "Easy peasy." Clarke rolls her eyes. _

"_We'll figure something out." _

"_Better do it fast before baldy gets back." _

"_Not helping," she scolds as Murphy smirks at her annoyance. _

The footsteps of several guards enter the room, and Clarke freezes up.

"_Shit," Murphy says, and Clarke thinks that's the only accurate statement there is to describe their predicament. _

_But the guards don't advance. Instead, they put down their weapons.

_

"_We are loyal to _Heda. _We care for her," says the man to Clarke's far left, "We will help you save her life." _

_And so their journey begins. _

_Clarke and Murphy carry Lexa's stretcher while Aden walks by her side, making sure she stays comfortable on the board. The guards ensure they're not seen, sneaking them down the lift and through some tunnels Clarke never knew existed, until they march up into the streets. It's nighttime, but it's not quiet. People are still milling around; voices carry. _

"_You must be careful," the man says, staring down forlornly at Lexa's prone form, "We will do as much as we can to delay notice of your absence. Keep her safe, _Klark kom Skaikru_, " he warns, meeting her eyes in a fierce gaze of loyalty. Clarke swallows._

"_I won't let anything happen to her." He smiles, so small she almost misses it. _

"_Go. _Ste yuj."

"_Mochof," _She replies, and he bows his head to her before he and the others disappear back into the tunnels. _

"_Here we go," Murphy sighs as he hoists the end of Lexa's stretcher, adjusting his grip. _

_They move, weaving through streets, sticking to the shadows and alleyways as best as they can. They're almost spotted a few times, but Aden draws a blanket up over Lexa's face to shield her from view. It seems like it takes an eon to reach the healers. They're speaking in hushed Trigedaslang, standing around a small, open topped cart that's hitched to two horses. _

_Ghany bows her head as they draw nearer. _

"_There is a few days worth of food for you," Albe gestures to the cart. Aden climbs up into the back of the cart to take the front of Lexa's stretcher from Clarke's hands, he and Murphy pushing until she was resting securely on the bottom. Aden sits by her head, sandy blonde hair falling into his eyes as he settles, straight backed and regal. _Like Lexa.

_There's a small bench from where someone could control the horses, and Clarke moves to hop up. Murphy reaches out, his palm ghosting over her shoulder. _

"_Let me," he says, gesturing to Lexa in the back, eyes downcast, "You sit with her." Clarke stares at him with a mixture of shock and appreciation. All she can do is tilt her chin in return in a way that reminds her all too much of Lexa. _

_She clammers up into the back alongside Aden while Murphy hoists himself to take the reins. _

"_Good luck," Albe says, "We wish you safe passage." Clarke reaches her hand out over the edge of the cart to take Albe's forearm into her own. _

"_Thank you. All of you. May we meet again," she says. They smile in return, unfamiliar with her Traveler's Blessing, but seeming to take it in kind. _

_And with that, they're off, cart creaking against the streets as they make their way towards the gates of Polis and into the unknown beyond. _

"_Where to, Clarke?" Murphy asks, turning his head slightly to face her. _

_Clarke doesn't know where else to go, that's why she says it. Not because she really wants to go back there. She doesn't have good memories there â€“ just Finn's death and the pain of fighting for survival on the ground, the feeling of being trapped with nowhere else to go, the reminder that she murdered everyone in Mount Weather for just 44 of her hundred. _

"_Home, I guess." _

_Murphy laughs hollowly, "Where's that?" _

_Clarke lets his words sink in, momentarily despondent before she realizes something. She thinks she just might know where home is, and it's not Arkadia, or the dropship, or Polis, or even the Ark. It's currently inches away from her, barely breathing, trapped under furs and blankets and sheets. _

_It's Lexa. _

"_Just hold on for me," she whispers as she leans down to press her lips to Lexa's hairline, "Just hold on tight and don't let go." _

Lexa stares at her, eyes wide in shock, mouth going slightly slack.

"Clarke."

"I'm here," she breathes, fingers curling a little more desperately around Lexa's own.

Lexa doesn't know how to feel. Everything seems to be spinning out of control. She is no longer Heda and she is running from her own people, away from her city. That's what frightens her, curls into the pit of her stomach like a snake, chokes her lungs beneath its constricting weight.

She is no longer Heda. But no Heda has ever lived without the spirit of the Commander inside of them. It has never been done. The Commander's spirit rests in its chosen natblida until their death, upon which it moves to choose its successor. She should not be alive. She should be dead. And she doesn't know what this means, she doesn't know what will happen to her, or to whoever is chosen to replace her, despite the very real fact that she is still breathing.

"I should not be alive," She says, shaking her head. Clarke looks stunned into silence.

Finally she speaks, and Lexa wants to lose herself in the ocean of her eyes, filled with swirling emotion.

"You know," her voice cracks, "You still haven't learned that when someone saves your life, it's customary to say 'thank you.'"

Lexa remembers those same words, barked at her in some underground room, hiding from pauna, her shoulder dislocated. She remembers Clarke saying I need you, remembers the way she couldn't help but admire the strength and resilience and sheer determination in this woman's very soul, realizing that there was something incredibly special about Klark kom Skaikru; she was a force of nature that pulled Lexa straight into her orbit. Love was weakness, but Lexa remembers that night, watching over Clarke sleep in the woods, realizing what she was feeling. Realizing the stuttering of her heart and the twisting of her stomach and the way she was just so utterly, inexplicably enthralled by Clarke meant that she might be falling for her, that she felt something far beyond mutual respect and a shared endgame for her. That she wanted to spend countless nights like the one they'd just shared, opening up, swapping stories, learning about each other. She remembers that night as the night she'd realized there was no turning back from this. Something about Clarke had thawed the walls she'd tried so desperately to build around her heart, and for whatever reason, she just didn't have the strength to put them back up, not against Clarke. (Never against Clarke).

Lexa smiles faintly, feeling a twinge of pain in her abdomen, "No Commander has ever lived without the spirit. We did not think it possible." Clarke blinks in understanding.

"I know you think that you should be dead, for whatever stupid noble reason you have, some duty to your people, but I don't give a shit." Lexa opens her mouth in shock, but she can't help the amusement that twinkles in her eyes.

"I would do anything to save you. I'd do it again in a heartbeat. Anything not to lose you. I don't care," Clarke finishes, tears beginning to fall down her cheeks. Lexa falls silent, contemplating.

"Thank you," she settles on. Clarke's gaze shoots up to meet hers in wonder. (Lexa's meager breath is stolen away by the look in those eyes).

Clarke leans forward, face inching closer and Lexa blinks rapidly against the onslaught, feels her stomach turning in on itself. Clarke's forehead settles awkwardly against her own, and Lexa's heart breathes a sigh of contentment. Her eyes flutter shut against the press of Clarke's skin, the warmth of her breath ghosting across her lips.

"I don't want to lose you," she says, shaky and uncertain.

"I'm right here," Lexa whispers, voice raspy with the emotion she feels rumbling in her chest, threatening to tear a hole through her skin.

Clarke laughs, wet and happy.

"Yes, you are," she replies, and Lexa doesn't ever want this moment to end.

Clarke makes no effort to move, and Lexa doesn't make her. They sit, foreheads pressed against each other, breathing deep and easy, synching up to the erratic beating of their hearts, the overwhelming sense of comfort invading their senses, and Lexa feels swept away by the love she feels winding around her; acceptance, relief, care, _need_. She feels tears in her eyes and she tries to sniff them away.

Clarke opens her eyes, pulls back slightly.

"You're crying."

"So it would seem," Lexa chuckles throatily in return. Clarke's hand comes up to her cheek, brushing against her lashes. Then she leans down, pressing a soft kiss underneath her eyelid, taking the tears with her. Lexa chokes on the emotion filling her entire being.

"Don't," she says, and then she's kissing her, lips soft and reverent, a kaleidoscope of gentleness and passion all rolled into one, like this might be the last time their lips ever touch, like Clarke's spent a year in The Dead Zone and she's finally found water. Like there's hope for a tomorrow.

(Lexa swears she sees stars).

They break apart only for air, panting. Lexa wheezes, suddenly aware of the pain in her stomach.

Clarke moves back to her chair at Lexa's side, entwining their hands again.

"Whatever happens," Clarke murmurs, "because of the spirit and you still being alive? We'll figure it out together." Lexa nods against the pain, feels Clarke's grip reassuringly squeeze her fingers.

"You should rest," she continues, "We've still got a long way to go, and you're still very weak." Lexa nods again, as thoroughly as she can.

"I'll be here when you wake up," she whispers, and Lexa smiles.

"I look forward to it."

She closes her eyes to the twinkling smile of the woman she loves, and Lexa finds it hard to remember any time in the last few years that she felt this damn happy.

Clarke sits by Lexa's side until her ragged breathing evens out, tracing her eyes over the form of the woman who had changed so much of her life in the short time they've known each other. She heaves a sigh of relief. She'd been worried she might never wake up again.

Clarke squeezes Lexa's fingers before she stands, making her way out of the small abandoned hut they'd found nestled in the middle of the woods, about a quarter of the way to Arkadia. It's getting lighter now, the sun beginning to peek out over the horizon, splashing across the sky in vibrant reds and oranges, and Clarke never fails to be astounded by its beauty. The artist in her aches for colors, so she can fully capture the essence of it all on paper. (She remembers Lexa sitting with her on her balcony, watching her sketch, offering to find her all the art supplies she wanted or needed, and Clarke remembers her stomach swooping as she met those dazzling green eyes, swooning over the gesture, but not quite ready to admit it to herself).

"Whatcha doin' out here, Princess? Shouldn't you be with your girlfriend?" Murphy drawls. Clarke looks up to find him leaning against a tree trunk, fiddling with a stray twig between his fingers. (She ignores the sting the nickname brings her).

"Lexa's asleep," she replies simply. She pauses for a minute, taking in the lush greenness of the trees around her.

"Where's Aden?" She asks. Murphy nods behind her.

"He's walking around the perimeter again. I told him he didn't have to but he insisted. Kid's stubborn as hell I'll give him that." Clarke smiles. Another one of the many ways that Aden reminds her of Lexa.

Murphy pushes himself up off the ground, dusting off his pants as he stands.

"When do you want to leave?"

"Soon," she replies, "The sooner we can get Lexa adequate medical care the better. I don't want her to be out here any longer than she needs to be." He nods.

"I'll start loading up the wagon if you wanna find the kid." She

nods.

"Okay." Clarke turns, making her way back around the side of the hut, leaves crunching beneath the soles of her boots. It doesn't take her long to find Aden. He's crouched low to the ground, sitting back on his haunches, staring wordlessly out amongst the trees. Clarke walks up slowly, moving to lower herself next to him.

They sit in silence for a few moments, enjoying the way the radioactivity of the trees glistens against the sun's early morning rays. Moments like this remind Clarke that maybe someday her life can be like this. She can wake up every morning next to Lexa and find serenity in the tangle of their limbs and the breach of the sun over the horizon as it stretches across Polis. She wants that, desperately so. She wants to wake up and actually enjoy herself; live. She wants to wake up and not be mired in blood and death and impossible choices. She wants a future worth surviving for.

But today is not that day.

"I remember when my nomon would sing me songs about the trees, when I was young, before I came to be trained by Heda in Polis," Aden says, and his voice is wistful; pained, "That was before she died. Heda and the other natblidas are the only family I have left anymore," he finishes quietly. He turns to look up at her, eyes wide and imploring.

"I don't want Heda to die. I love her." Clarke reaches out, running her hand over his shoulder as soothingly as she can muster.

"I know," she returns. (The words so do I die on her lips), "She's going to be alright. I have to believe that. You should too." Aden nods, jutting his chin up in that way she's seen Lexa do a thousand times.

"I'm glad Heda found you," he says, sincerity lacing his words as gazes up at her. Clarke can't help the swell of her heart in response.

"I'm glad I found her too," Clarke says, feeling her heart beat staccato against her rib cage.

"We should go," Aden states after a moment of stretching silence, pulling himself to his feet.

Clarke expresses her agreement, following him back to the front of the hut, where Murphy stands with the cart, running his hands down the side of one of the horse's heads. He wordlessly follows her into the hut as Aden clammers up into his usual spot in the back.

Murphy blows out a few of the candles before coming over to grab the foot end of Lexa's stretcher.

"Ready?" He asks. She nods and they lift on the count of three, practiced in their maneuvers by now, weaving out into the open air. Once Lexa is settled on the back of the cart, Clarke returns into the hut to retrieve their packs and Albe's medicine.

"Do you want me to steer first?" Clarke questions as she stows away their supplies in the corner across from Aden. Murphy

shrugs.

"Doesn't matter to me." She had been up for a majority of the night, watching over Lexa, but she can tell Murphy's exhausted, both mentally and physically, despite having slept more than her. So she'll let him off the hook for now.

"I'll go first." He nods as he climbs into the back, resting his head against Clarke's back once she settles with the reins.

They travel in silence for longer than Clarke can keep track of.

She focuses on the smell of the horses and the wind in her hair, on the weight of leather between her palms and the press of Murphy's head against the small of her back, on the creaking sounds of wood as the cart rolls along the uneven ground below, the glinting of sunlight through the breaks in the trees, the sound of soft snores and ragged breathing. None of them were particularly good measures for the passage of time, but Clarke supposes she lost that ability once Finn tainted the memory of her father's watch.

It was hard to blame Finn â€“ he had been doing what he thought was right, after all. She can't fault him for it. He certainly didn't mean anything malicious by offering her the watch back. But after that day, after he'd returned the watch back to her while they were hiding from the acid fog, she couldn't bear to look at it - knowing that its existence was the reason Finn had gone into that Grounder village in the first place, the reason why eighteen innocent people were dead. So she stowed it in the bottom of a bag and hid that bag in her designated room on the Ark.

She didn't spend much time there anyway. It felt suffocating. And she was busy trying to arrange and plan for a war and late nights were sort of part of the deal. She'd spent countless hours poring over drawings and maps, talking out frustrations with the Grounder Commander long into the night. Sometimes war talk lapsed into something else, shared stories about hardships and tentative talk about their respective cultures (Clarke's pretty sure one of those nights, hunched against a table together amidst the waning, flickering orange light of the candles that cast a strange shimmering glow across the fabric of the tent, illuminating their silhouettes, is when she'd started to fall for Lexa).

Nights she did have to herself she often spent with the Grounders anyway. She looks back and thinks she was (and still is) just as fascinated with them as Octavia (but maybe that was more of a fascination for a particular Grounder than anything else, and Clarke can't believe how hard she was crushing on Lexa before she even realized it â€“ it hadn't been until the kiss that her feelings finally caught up with her. Lexa's lips were warm and soft and hesitant against her own, and her mind had screamed oh. Oh. This is where you're at. Now kiss her back, stupid_).

She often spent nights away from the stifling, mechanical whirring of the Ark. She'd lived in a prison in space for seventeen years of her life, and she wasn't going to waste any spare moments she had out in the fresh air trapped back under fluorescent lights. She was sure her mother wouldn't have liked it, but she'd never really told her. She'd just snuck out, breathing in the air and making her way to the Grounder camp, Miller's dad usually on patrol, letting her out

through the gates because he wanted his son back, and sometimes she snuck out through Raven's gate, after asking Wick to show her how to turn the electricity off. She spent those nights mostly with Lexa, sometimes talking, sometimes not, and she thinks that those nights were something she should have treasured more. Happiness is fleeting, after all.

(She hopes they'll have an infinite amount of more nights just like those, taking walks deep into the woods, shaking off Lexa's guards and grinning breathless like teenaged fools, sitting in a war tent and talking about shared pain and heavy burdens, Clarke looking at Lexa and not realizing the weight of the twisting in her heart, what exactly that floating heaviness deep in her chest meant. She wants to watch the stars with Lexa and kiss her in the moonlight and remind her that love is never weakness).

And then, after the betrayal, after Mount Weather, she didn't step foot inside Camp Jaha â€“ Arkadia. (She keeps forgetting it's Arkadia now). She couldn't bring herself to go back there and so off into the woods she went, sometimes spending time with Niylah at the trading post, but usually alone. And after that, Polis. Back to Lexa, and as far as she knows, her room is still the same as when she left it nearly four months ago, and her father's watch is still ticking in a corner somewhere underneath a discarded bag of old clothes too dirty and ripped to be wearable anymore.

She knows that's where they're headed, but she can't help the sense of foreboding that holds itself around her, tight and unyielding. She knows they won't welcome her with open arms. She's just as much a pariah as Murphy is. She's a Grounder now: she looks like one, cares for oneâ€¦ even abandoned her own people. Lexa and Aden won't be welcomed at all, and she just has to hope that they won't shoot them on sight. She hopes she can find a way to appeal to Pike, and if she's lucky, her mother and Kane will be nearby to help her do the convincing. She's not sure if she could convince Bellamy, not after their last encounter and certainly not from the hostility he seems to ooze over Lexa. She knows a lot of people harbor a great deal of hatred towards her (Jasper) but she hopes they can find a way to reconcile; all of them. No matter what, they're still her people. She'll look out for them even if they don't want her to.

She sighs, stretching her shoulders and cracking her neck, careful not to move too much lest she disturb Murphy's position against her back.

Suddenly Aden's head pops up next to her thigh, and he's tapping her softly.

"I'm hungry," he says, "There's a village a few miles to the west where we could get something to eat." Clarke nods her assent, pulling on the reins to bring the horses to a standstill.

Murphy jerks awake the moment they stop. He flies up to his knees, his eyes slightly wild, looking more than ready to defend himself against attack.

"It's okay," she reaches out, putting a tentative hand on his shoulder, "We just stopped." Murphy visibly relaxes before shoving her hand off, glowering slightly as he moves away.

"He is clearly Skaikru," Aden remarks as he hops down from the back of the cart, careful not to disturb Lexa, "And you are the mighty Wanheda. You will be noticed. I will go myself and bring something in return for you. You watch over Heda."

Clarke worries her bottom lip between her teeth.

"I don't like you going alone." Aden smiles before standing up straight, clasping his hands behind his back to mimic Lexa.

"I will be alright. It should not take me long. I will be back shortly. It is not a long walk." Murphy grunts in approval, turning to his side. Clarke sighs.

"Hurry back." Aden nods, before he disappears into the trees.

Clarke throws her legs over the back of the bench and slides down to sit by Lexa's head. She reaches out, running her fingers through the stringy tresses of her dark hair.

"You're really into her, huh?" Murphy says, eagle eyes taking them in. Clarke feels a blush in her cheeks and chooses not to respond to that. Unfortunately, she thinks he takes her silence as the answer he was looking for.

Murphy grins slightly before turning away, leaning his head against the side of the cart, closing his eyes again.

True to his word, Aden returns within the half hour, carrying a tin of meat in his hands and a smile on his young face. They eat in silence before they hear the rustling in the trees behind them. Murphy tenses. Clarke instinctively moves to shield Lexa's body.

"Shit!" Murphy hisses, ducking his head below the side of the cart, "What do we do?"

"Don't act like that," Clarke hisses in return as Aden pulls a blanket fully over Lexa's form.

A few Grounders come into view, skull masks covering their faces, war paint on their eyes. Clarke can't tell who they are; she thinks they're Trikru but she can't be sure.

"Chon yu bilaik?" One of the Grounders asks, eyes sweeping over them. Clarke can see the distrust in his eyes.

She tries to think quick.

(She was always good on her feet; Wells always said so. She was always able to get out of a sticky situation " sneaking somewhere she wasn't supposed to be with Wells, sneaking somewhere after hours, sneaking out of someone's room after a one night stand " she was always good at coming up with believable stories under pressure).

"Ai laik Niyah kom Trikru," Clarke says, and hopes Niylah doesn't mind her borrowing her name, "This is " She gestures at Murphy, who supplies her with a name for himself, although she winces at the awful English accent to his words.

"_Otan kom Trikru," he parrots back, but he doesn't look Trikru at all and his words are harsh. He doesn't know the language, not as much as Clarke does.

"_Ai laik Aden," their last companion adds, a smile on his face in an attempt to ease the tension between the two groups. Clarke tries to keep the panic from her eyes.

"_What are you doing out here?" _

"_We're just trying to get home," Clarke responds, letting the Trigedasleng wash over her. Lexa mostly spoke to her in English; she was slightly out of practice, "We spent a week in Polis." _

The Grounders eye each other nervously, shifting on their feet. Clarke holds her breath.

"Okay," they say, evidently accepting Clarke's half-truth, "Safe travels." Clarke lets out a sigh of relief as they continue on their way, traipsing soundlessly back into the brush.

"Fuck that was close," Murphy whistles, relaxing back to the floor of the cart.

"We need to keep moving," Clarke says as Aden pulls the cover down from Lexa's face, and Clarke feels her heart seize up at the twisted look of pain crossing her slumbering face, "We can't afford to get caught with the Commander in the back of our cart, especially not once word gets out that she's supposed to be dead."

"So let's get a move on, Princess," Murphy drawls, hopping up to take the horses' reins. Clarke rolls her eyes but lets him, settling herself next to Lexa, taking her hand softly between her own.

"How much longer?" Aden asks, concern in his voice as he directs her free hand to feel Lexa's forehead, which is burning hot against her skin.

Clarke lurches forward with the jolt of the cart as Murphy guides them back onto the road.

She shakes her head, looking out into the distance beyond, at the shimmering of the sun and the stillness of the air. Lexa's breathing is ragged and heavy and it cuts into Clarke's heart, breaks her open and scares her senseless.

"Too long," she whispers in response, eyes glazing over with tears.

"We'll get there," she says to Lexa in particular, even though she knows she can't really hear her, "Just keep fighting for me."

She presses a kiss to Lexa's cheek; squeezes her hand and threads their fingers together.

She turns her gaze to the blue-green horizon, and hopes for a future.

* * *

><p>Notes: Long passages in italics are flashbacks. Any dialogue that's italicized in English is Trigedasleng that I don't know how to translate properly so I just left it.</p>

Trigedasleng:

Chon yu bilaik? - Who are you?

Natblida - Nightbloods

Fleimkepa - Flamekeeper

Em pleni - Enough

Mochof - Thank you

Sha - Yes

Ste yuj - Be strong

Nomon - Mother

So I'm still really angry over 3x07 so here's me trying to bring myself some peace of mind by rewriting it. While this is a general season 3 fic, it is at its heart a clexa fic. The focus will be on their relationship but also on an overarching plot. I've got most of the story arcs worked out, it's just a matter of writing them all down and embellishing them into something coherent, so I'm shooting for an update every two to three weeks, but since finals are coming up just around the corner, that tentative schedule may be pushed back a bit until the summer because I'm not sure how often I'll be able to find time to write. This is gonna be a long one, so I hope you'll stick around for the ride with me :)

you can also find me on tumblr at scmeenshaw

End
file.